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United States
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6700 Safety & Health
June 2000
0067-2820-MTDC



Violence Awareness Training For Field Employees

*Fiscal Year 1999 Findings
and Recommendations*



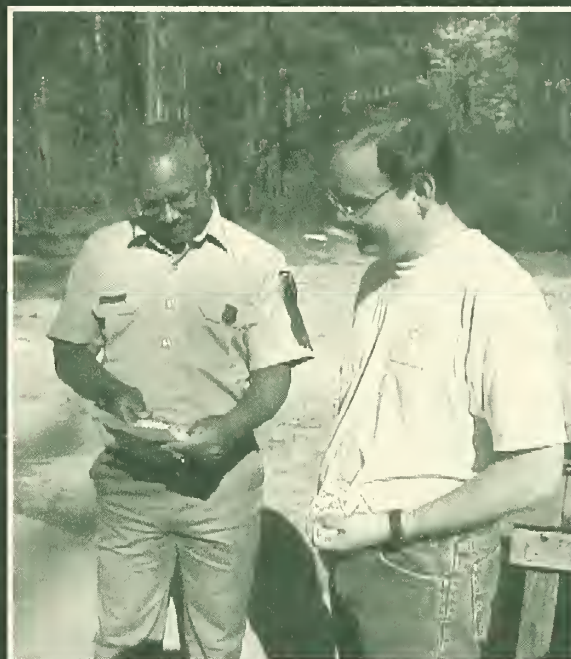
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Violence Awareness Training For Field Employees

*Fiscal Year 1999 Findings
and Recommendations*



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**USDA Forest Service
Technology & Development Program
Missoula, Montana**

**9E92H68—Personal Safety Awareness
For Field Employees**

June 2000

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Executive Summary

This progress report describes a project to develop training materials that can help USDA Forest Service employees avoid or better handle violence and threats of violence. This report includes several recommended policy changes that are intended to help prevent violence.

This project came about because of concern throughout the Forest Service that employees are at significant risk of violence, especially while working in remote settings. At the behest of the Forest Service's Washington Office Safety and Health unit, a project team was assembled at the Missoula Tech-

nology and Development Center. The project team examined and evaluated existing training programs and available data on violent victimizations and carried out extensive interviews with workers throughout the Forest Service. Based on the development work to date, the project team recommends producing a video training program of at least five modules. The first of these modules should be designed to raise employee awareness of potential problems and provide general preventive measures that can be employed by all Forest Service workers. The second module will be addressed to workers

with supervisory duties. It is designed to raise supervisors' awareness of potential problems and encourage them to make violence safety a priority. The third module will help Forest Service workers understand and cope with violence or threats they may face in their community and home because of their job. The fourth module will focus on how workers in field settings can read scenes and people to avoid or better handle potentially dangerous situations. The fifth module will consider what to do if a potentially dangerous encounter takes place in a remote setting. 

Background and Project History

Beginnings of the Project

In recent years Forest Service employees have been victimized by violence and threats of violence. Forest Service employees at all levels in the organization have expressed concern for their personal safety or that of their coworkers. In response, the Washington Office Safety and Health unit decided in October 1998 to sponsor a project to learn more about the nature and extent of exposure to violent victimization of Forest Service workers so appropriate training materials could be developed, produced, and disseminated.

The project was based at the Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC) with Jon Driessen, Ph.D., serving as Project Leader. In December of 1998 MTDC contracted with Daniel Doyle, Ph.D., a criminologist from Missoula, to serve as Principal Investigator. Later, Lisa Outka, a graduate student in criminology, was added as Project Assistant.

Sharpening the Focus of the Project

As originally envisioned, a comprehensive personal safety program for Forest Service workers would have to address violence and threats of violence in three different arenas:

- Safety in remote work settings
- Safety in the community and at home and
- Safety in Forest Service offices.

Given the lack of available training materials and the overall dearth of information on the nature and extent of violence in remote work settings, the project team determined to concentrate initial efforts on exposure to violence in remote work settings. Subsequent development work has shown a substantial overlap between the three arenas. For example, disputes arising in remote work settings sometimes spill over into the office setting. On-the-job threats of violence sometimes spill over into the community and home life of Forest Service employees. There is a need for training in office safety, but other training materials are currently available. The need for training in office safety is not as immediate as the need for training in the other arenas. Some material that applies to office safety can be integrated into training modules focusing on general safety awareness, problems in remote work settings, and personal safety in the community and at home.

Much of the concern about violence arose because of a few dramatic, very serious incidents of violence against Forest Service workers. However, development work to date has shown that verbal threats, abuse, and harassment are far more common than physical attacks. Therefore, a major focus of the training program has to be on handling such threats and reducing the probability that they will escalate into physical violence.

No training program can prevent all violence. Some violence (including very serious violence like assault or arson) is very difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate or avoid. Many of the root causes of violence in our society and of the tensions that give rise to violence

are outside the control of the Forest Service or its workers. The orientation of this program will be on giving Forest Service employees the tools to anticipate (insofar as possible) and cope with threats to personal safety that arise in a sometimes unpredictable world.

Five Training Modules—Recommendations

Based on work done to date, the project team recommends that the violence awareness and personal safety program take the form of at least five videotape modules with associated training materials. The first module (and the module with the highest priority) would be designed to raise employee awareness of potential problems and to provide general preventive measures that can be employed by Forest Service workers in a variety of work settings. The second module would be addressed to workers with supervisory duties. It would be designed to raise their awareness of potential problems and to encourage them to make violence safety a priority. The third module would be oriented toward helping Forest Service workers understand and cope with violence or threats they may face in their community and at home because of their jobs. The fourth module would focus on how workers in field settings can read scenes and people to avoid or better handle potentially dangerous situations. The fifth module would concern what to do if a potentially dangerous encounter takes place in a remote setting. ☞

Work Completed During Fiscal Year 1999

As shown in the Project Timeline (Appendix A), the goal for Fiscal Year 1999 was to complete early development work for all modules and to start shooting the videotape that will be used in the modules.

Early Development Activities

Meetings were held at MTDC during February of 1999 between members of the project team, M. Caroline Deaderick of the Office of Safety and Occupational Health, and Pat Henderson, Program Analyst with Forest Service Law Enforcement. Caroline and Pat had already done substantial development work that proved to be invaluable in setting the parameters of the project. They also turned over several boxes of related materials they had systematically compiled. These materials were analyzed to extract information useful for the project and to determine whether any existing training programs could be adapted by the Forest Service.

Initial Data Gathering

Incident reports from Forest Service Law Enforcement dating back several years were analyzed. An effort was made to gather and code information on as many known incidents of violence or threats of violence as possible. Incident reports from other government land management agencies (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and others) were also analyzed.

Developing a Typology

Based on these materials, a tentative typology of typical incidents was developed to serve as a starting point for further development work. Given the lack of detail in the written records and the fact that most incidents are never recorded, indepth interviews were needed to fully understand the extent and nature of employee exposure to violence or threats of violence.

Interviews in the Northern Region


The first set of interviews began in June 1999 in the Northern Region. Northern Region law enforcement officials helped identify about 40 Forest Service employees who had experienced violent encounters or threats of violence in recent years. From this pool, 16 employees were selected to be interviewed. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to over 2 hours. Interviews were tape recorded so they could be transcribed and coded. As interviews were carried out across various locations in the Northern Region, the study team was identifying Forest Service workers who could later appear on camera and possible locations where video footage could be shot.

Interviews in the Southwest Region

Given the national scope of the training program and regional variations in the nature of violent encounters, the team needed to conduct interviews in various parts of the country. Also, based on the interviews completed in the Northern Region, the study team became aware of the need to interview not only those who had actually experienced violence or the threat of violence, but those who do not get into such encounters even though their work brings them into extensive contact with the public. Such employees have often developed effective techniques for avoiding or diffusing problems—techniques that can be taught to other employees. Pat Henderson made arrangements for the study team to conduct indepth interviews with 18 Forest Service employees in the Southwest Region.

First Video Footage

The first video footage was shot the third week of August in and around Cooke City, MT. Included were interviews with local Forest Service worker Larry McKee and his wife. Considerable background footage was also recorded.

Another video shoot took place in late September in Helena, MT. The main subject was Dave Turner, a minerals technician with the Helena National Forest. Additional background footage was shot. 

Work Plan for Fiscal Year 2000

As shown in the Project Timeline (Appendix A), the major goal for Fiscal Year 2000 is to:

- Complete all development work for Module 1 (general awareness for all employees), Module 2 (awareness for supervisors), Module 3 (community and home personal safety), Module 4 (reading scenes and people), and Module 5 (handling encounters).
- Complete all videotaping for Modules 1 and 2.
- Complete a substantial portion of the videotaping for Modules 3, 4, and 5.
- Complete production of Module 1.

Interviews in the Southern Region

In January 2000, Daniel Doyle traveled throughout Alabama and Mississippi, interviewing 16 Forest Service employees. These interviews provided the opportunity to study violence and threats of violence in different parts of the country. Doyle identified more subjects to interview on camera and identified possible locations for shooting videotape.

More Video Footage

The study team returned to Alabama in late March to shoot video of Forest Service employees and locations that had been previously identified. The team will also travel to the Portland area in the Pacific Northwest Region in late

June to do additional development work and videotaping.

The team had been scheduled to return to the Santa Fe/Albuquerque area in May. However, most of the Forest Service employees who were to be interviewed on video were unavailable because of the outbreak of the Cerro Grande Wildfire near Santa Fe. This trip has been rescheduled for late July.

Complete Module 1

By the end of Fiscal Year 2000, the offline and online video edits for Module 1 will be completed and Module 1 should be ready or nearly ready for dissemination. The delay in shooting videotape in the Santa Fe/Albuquerque area caused by the Cerro Grande Wildfire may result in a short delay in the release of Module 1.

Recommended Goals for Fiscal Years 2001 and 2002

Goals for Fiscal Year 2001

The goals for Fiscal Year 2001 are to:

- Complete videotaping Modules 3, 4, and 5.
- Develop supplementary training materials for Modules 2 and 3.
- Finish editing Modules 2 and 3.
- Start editing Modules 4 and 5.
- Complete production of Modules 2 and 3.

Goals for Fiscal Year 2002

The goals for Fiscal Year 2002 are to:

- Complete editing Modules 4 and 5.
- Complete production of supplementary training materials for Modules 4 and 5.
- Prepare Modules 4 and 5 for distribution.

Tentative Outlines of the Modules

Development work done to date provides some guidance on the form and content of the modules. Because development work is ongoing, the suggested content of some modules is more complete than others. The final product may be somewhat different than the proposal. Supplementary training materials, the format of which is yet to be determined, will also be developed to accompany some modules.

While existing training programs and written reports of violent incidents were analyzed, the content of the modules will be derived primarily from extensive interviews with Forest Service employees throughout the organization. This assures that the training materials will address the potentially dangerous situations these employees actually encounter as they go about their work.

To increase efficiency and shorten production time and costs, videotaping for all modules will be done on an ongoing basis. Videos will feature Forest Service employees speaking of their experiences and describing methods they use to avoid and cope with violence. Videotaping will be done in the settings where the employees work.

Outline of Module 1— Personal Safety Awareness for All Employees

Module 1 focuses on general awareness of potentially dangerous situations, precautions that Forest Service employees need to take, and the actions they should take if they experience violence or threats of violence. The audience for this module will be all Forest Service employees.

General Awareness

- An understanding of the extent and nature of the problem of violence.
 - Examples of dangerous situations that have occurred.
 - The general need to be alert and vigilant.
- Special concerns for female workers
 - Nature of the problems most likely to be encountered.
- Some special concerns for field workers.
 - The need to be especially careful in remote work settings.
 - Lack of nearby backup.
 - Difficulties in maintaining contact.
 - Situations that change rapidly.
 - Wearing the uniform.
- The role responsibilities and scope of work of Forest Service employees.
 - The proper role of Forest Service law enforcement officers.
 - Knowing the limits and when to call for help.
 - Making personal safety a priority.
 - Separating one's work from one's self.
 - Using local law enforcement as backup.

Precautions

- Being ready for problems
 - Check-in/check-out procedures.
 - Use of radio or cell phone.
 - Keeping equipment in good repair.
- The importance of knowing the local situation.
 - Being aware of and sensitive to the local history and culture.
 - Learning about local controversies involving the Forest Service.
 - Becoming aware of local persons who have disputes with the Forest Service.
 - Being aware of local illegal uses of the forests and use of the forests by criminals.
 - Developing people skills.
 - Respecting the rights of visitors.

- Making sure employee attitudes and actions don't provoke attacks or unnecessarily escalate risk.
- Learning to read scenes and people (Module 4).

What To Do After a Violent or Threatening Encounter

- Being willing to call for help.
- The importance of immediate reporting.
- Reporting procedures.
- Seeking assistance after the encounter.
 - Medical assistance.
 - Posttrauma counseling.
- Gathering evidence useful for law enforcement.

Outline of Module 2— Personal Safety Responsibilities for Supervisors

The second module is designed to acquaint Forest Service supervisors of the importance of personal safety and what they can do to better protect employees they supervise. The audience for this module is all Forest Service employees with supervisory duties. More development work is needed for Module 2.

Recognizing the Importance of Safety

- Making the safety of employees a priority.
 - Violence safety is as important as other safety issues.
 - Encouraging employees to err on the side of safety.
- The supervisor's responsibilities to employees.
 - Taking violence or threats to employees seriously.
 - Listening to and acting on employee concerns.

- Standing up for employees and giving them the support they need.
- Making personal safety part of employee evaluations.

Protecting Employees

- Making sure employees understand their scope of work .
 - The proper role of Forest Service law enforcement.
 - Encouraging employees to know their limits and when to call for help.
 - Being supportive of employees who back out of potentially dangerous situations.
- Assigning personnel in a way that maximizes safety.
 - Recognizing potentially dangerous situations.
 - Recognizing when employees should not work alone.
 - Emphasizing teamwork.
- Requiring violence safety training for high-risk employees.
- Establishing specific violence safety procedures.
 - Check-in/check-out procedures.
 - Knowing where employees are.
 - Protecting the safety of employees who collect money.

Outline of Module 3—Community and Home Personal Safety

The third module concerns how Forest Service employees may face increased potential for violence and threats of violence in the home and community. It will discuss how work-related problems can spill over into the home life of employees, how this can be especially difficult for those living and working in

small, remote communities, and how employees can cope with threats and violence in their communities. The audience for this module will be any Forest Service employee who has contact with the public, especially those involved in enforcing rules and regulations. Significantly more development work is needed for Module 3.

Spillover of Work-Related Problems Into Home Life

- Examples of incidents that have occurred.
- Situations where such spillover is likely to occur.
- How problems can move from the field setting into the community.
- Threats to family and personal property.
- Impacts on quality of life.
- Maintaining separation between work and home.

Special Concerns for Those Living in Small, Remote Communities

- Problems with living and working in a small town.
- Lack of privacy or a sense of anonymity.
- Lack of a clear separation between work life and home life.
- Being seen as the representative of the Federal government.
- Enforcing rules on friends and neighbors.

Coping With Harassment and Threats

- Knowing troublesome people and circumstances (Module 1).
- Avoiding potentially dangerous situations (Module 4).
- The importance of reporting threats.

- The role of supervisors when employees are threatened (Module 2).
- Developing a support system.
- Techniques for diffusing tension (Module 5).
- Being prepared to protect yourself, your family, and your property.
- Getting assistance in coping with tension and trauma.

Outline of Module 4—Reading Scenes and People

The fourth module will focus on how workers in field settings can read the scene and people to avoid or better cope with potentially dangerous situations. The audience for this module will be any Forest Service employee who contacts the public in field settings, especially those involved in enforcing rules and regulations. Significantly more development work is needed for Module 4.

Reading the Scene and the People

- Things to consider before entering a situation.
 - General awareness, preparations, and precautions (Module 1).
 - Looking things over—developing observational skills.
 - Thinking through what to do before acting.
- Red flags to watch for.
 - Rule violations in progress.
 - Presence of weapons.
 - Drugs and alcohol.
 - Large groups.
 - Persons who appear to be out of place or without apparent purpose.
 - Other verbal or nonverbal cues.

Deciding What—If Anything—To Do

- Availability of backup.
 - Nature of the backup available.
 - How long will it take for help to arrive.
- Balancing the need to maintain personal safety and the need to get the job done.
 - Erring on the side of safety.
 - Knowing when to back off.
- Gathering information for law enforcement.
 - Reporting incidents as soon as possible.
 - Recording date, time and place of incident.
 - Noting names and descriptions of person involved.
 - Noting license numbers and vehicle descriptions.
 - Taking photographs.
- Preparing for possible confrontation (Module 5).

Outline of Module 5— Handling Potentially Dangerous Encounters

The fifth module will focus on what to do if an encounter takes place in a remote setting. The audience for this module will be any Forest Service employee who contacts the public in field settings, especially those enforcing compliance with rules and regulations. Significantly more development work is needed for Module 5.

Diffusing Tensions

- How to approach persons.
 - Identifying yourself.
 - Making small talk.
- The importance of listening.
 - Letting them vent anger.
 - Remaining calm.
- Being sensitive to the culture of those you are dealing with.
 - Understanding the culture (Module 1).
 - Avoiding embarrassing people.
- Using humor appropriately.

Different Encounter Styles

- When to use which type of encounter style:
 - Educational style.
 - Deemphasizing authority.
 - Building a relationship.
 - Using confrontations as an opportunity to teach.
 - Knowing the rules.
 - Explaining the rationale underlying rules.
 - Using warnings.
 - Give persons an opportunity to make things right.
- Enforcement style.
 - Knowing when to call for backup.
 - Being polite but firm.
 - Techniques for issuing citations or enforcing compliance.
 - Gathering the evidence for successful prosecution.

Tactics to Maximize Safety

- Being alert.
 - Reading the situation (Module 4).
 - Not being complacent.
 - Keeping track of people.

- Using the radio or cell phone.
 - Calling for backup.
 - Pretending to call for backup when out of range.
- Using the truck.
 - Staying in the truck if possible.
 - Positioning the truck for easy escape.
- Getting in and out fast.
 - Positioning yourself.

Other Possible Modules

The recommended work plan does not include a module on office safety. Training materials on office safety are widely available on the open market. It may be possible to adapt some of this material for Forest Service use. In the meantime, existing materials could be used.

For reasons discussed below, the “Good HOST Program” may need to be reevaluated in light of concerns for personal safety. Depending on the outcome of such a reevaluation, a module on balancing personal safety and being a good host may need to be developed. Training modules oriented to positions such as campground hosts or fee collection technicians may also be needed. ☹

Concerns From the Field—Three More Recommendations

This project record has covered the origin of the project, the development work done during Fiscal Year 1999 and part of Fiscal Year 2000, and the recommended time frames for production of five training modules that can be used to help reduce the risk of personal violence to Forest Service employees.

Our work uncovered three field-related problems that went beyond the scope of the current project. We feel these problems are of sufficient urgency to warrant attention from the Safety and Health Steering Committee. The description of the problems includes steps that can be taken to protect the personal safety of employees.

Personal Safety Concerns About the Good HOST Program

During interviews, many people who worked as campground hosts, fee collection officers, forest protection officers, and law enforcement officers, spoke frankly about the Good HOST Program. They said the program's emphasis on being friendly, cordial, and helpful sometimes placed employees in harm's way. This is especially so for employees who frequently engage the public as they check campgrounds, collect fees, and validate firewood permits. The current project, with its emphasis on training people to develop greater personal safety awareness will necessarily encourage workers to develop greater wariness when working with the public. Teaching workers to be more "streetwise" will mean training employees to keep a greater distance from the public while performing their jobs. Many current work practices of employees who try to be good hosts, such as shaking hands, getting out of the vehicle when

talking to persons, striking up friendly conversations with strangers, or giving visitors a lift, are ways workers expose themselves to increased risk of physical attack.

Recommendation—Within the scope of the current project, we would recommend a separate training video on how to balance personal safety and serve as a good host. Before producing this training video, the Good HOST Program needs to be addressed from a policy level to provide direction for training. A Servicewide task force should re-examine and make recommended changes regarding the current Good HOST Program within the Forest Service. The task force needs to pay specific attention to the inherent conflict between the role of a good host and that of the personal safety of employees, especially when they are working in remote settings. New policy guidelines need to be established.

Personal Safety Concerns About Collecting Money

While recreational fee collection has long been part of the work of Forest Service employees, the "fee demonstration project" has significantly increased the amount of money being collected. A sometimes resentful public is being charged for activities that used to be free. Over the course of a day, some employees collect and transport hundreds or even thousands of dollars. During our work in the field, we were told of personal safety risks for workers who collect cash from the public and from fee boxes. This money was often being collected by seasonal employees who were working alone in remote areas. Several workers told us about their fears of being robbed and physically assaulted. Agency control over this

money is slipshod. Thousands of dollars are being stuffed in plastic garbage bags and placed in a glove box or hidden under the seat of a vehicle. Such practices are creating an easy target for robbery. In addition, the poor internal auditing systems provide tempting opportunities for embezzlement.

Recommendation—We came up with a number of possible alternatives to the present practice of employees collecting money. Fee collection could be contracted to armed security companies or law enforcement officers could be charged with the task. Another alternative would be for the agency to eliminate all cash from fee collection areas by using a swipe card or other electronic means for visitors to pay fees. Perhaps permits could be sold by vendors in nearby towns. Some Forest Service employees have expressed doubts whether the fee demo program should continue given the risks involved.

Problems Caused by the Separation of Law Enforcement From Line Officers

Some years ago, law enforcement was removed from the control of line officers on Districts and Forests. This separation has resulted in confusion on the proper role of law enforcement personnel when problematic encounters occur. Since these encounters often involve a law or rule violation, they can be viewed as the primary responsibility of law enforcement personnel. But the line supervisors at forests and districts often wind up dealing with many compliance situations and problems. Given the vast territories that law enforcement officers patrol, it is rare for law enforcement officers to be available to assist in most of these situations.

The separation of Forest Service law enforcement from the control of line officers has also created problems with regard to violence safety training. Some district rangers may see such training as the responsibility of the law enforcement division.

Recommendation—The Forest Service needs to carefully examine the advisability of maintaining the clear separation

between law enforcement and the districts and forests within the context of employee safety. Serious consideration should be given to reintegrating law enforcement officers so they become part of a team effort in the personal safety training program on units. Training regarding personal safety in potentially violent encounters needs to be integrated into the overall safety training program, not relegated to law enforcement. District

rangers, forest supervisors, and first-line supervisors need to be held accountable for all aspects of employee safety. Because of the escalation in violent encounters, the Forest Service may need to add more law enforcement personnel so other Forest Service employees can turn over the more dangerous situations to those with advanced training to handle them. ☞

About the Authors

Jon Driessen received his Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Colorado in 1969 and joined the University of Montana as a professor of sociology. Since 1977, he has worked as a faculty affiliate at the Missoula Technology and Development Center. His most recent project has been production of the Forest Service training program, *Making a Crew*. He has also been involved in production of another recently released video, *Driving Mountain Roads: Slowing Down*. He is working on the production of a training video for drivers who transport firefighters under wildfire conditions.

Daniel P. Doyle received his Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Washington in 1984 and currently serves as professor of sociology and criminology at the University of Montana. He has done research in a variety of areas within sociology and criminology but has a special interest in the escalation of disputes into violence. In previous work for the Forest Service, he conducted a survey of and analyzed the sources of well-being of residents in resource-dependent communities in rural Montana.

Lisa Outka holds a bachelor's degree with a double major in political science and in sociology with an emphasis in criminology. She is currently a graduate student studying criminology in the sociology department at the University of Montana. She is interested in pursuing a career working within the criminal justice system at the federal level.

Appendix—Project Timeline

PROJECT TIMELINE		FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002
Module 1 – General Awareness					
• Development Work-----		■.....▲			
• Videotaping-----		■.....▲			
• Off Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• On Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• Production Completion-----		■.....▲			
Module 2 - Awareness for Supervisors					
• Development Work-----		■.....▲			
• Videotaping-----		■.....▲			
• Off Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• On Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• Supplementary Training Materials-----		■.....▲			
• Production Completion-----		■.....▲			
Module 3 - Community and Home Personal Safety					
• Development Work-----		■.....▲			
• Videotaping-----		■.....▲			
• Off Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• On Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• Supplementary Training Materials-----		■.....▲			
• Production Completion-----		■.....▲			
Module 4 - Reading Scenes and People					
• Development Work-----		■.....▲			
• Videotaping-----		■.....▲			
• Off Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• On Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• Supplementary Training Materials-----		■.....▲			
• Production Completion-----		■.....▲			
Module 5 - Handling Encounters					
• Development Work-----		■.....▲			
• Videotaping-----		■.....▲			
• Off Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• On Line Editing-----		■.....▲			
• Supplementary Training Materials-----		■.....▲			
• Production Completion-----		■.....▲			

Notes

Notes

Library Card

Driessen, Jon; Doyle, Daniel P.; Outka, Lisa. 2000. Personal safety awareness for field employees, violence awareness training: fiscal year 1999 findings and recommendations. Tech. Rep. 0067-2820-MTDC. Missoula, MT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center. 14 p.



This report describes a training program to help Forest Service employees avoid or handle violence and threats of violence. Previously published training materials were reviewed. In addition, interviews were conducted with Forest Service employees during 1999. Tentative plans call for five video modules: Module 1, Personal Safety Awareness for All Employees; Module 2, Personal Safety Responsibilities for Supervisors; Module 3, Community and Home Personal Safety; Module 4, Reading Scenes and People; Module 5, Handling Potentially Dangerous Encounters.

Keywords: harassment, remote work location, safety at work, threats, videotapes, work places

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